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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org.* All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The Platypus Review

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Back to Enlightenment values

An interview with Brendan O'Neill

Chris Mansour

On November 2, 2017, Chris Mansour interviewed Brendan O'Neill, editor of Spiked! and a panelist on a conversation that took place the night before entitled Is the Left Eating Itself?, part of an international discussion linked to Spiked!'s Unsafe Space Tour, which aimed to tackle issues such as campus culture, free speech, and Title IX. A recording of the conversation can be found at <https://archive.org/details/RMONeill>. What follows is an edited transcript of the interview.

Chris Mansour: What was the original impetus for starting the entire Unsafe Space Tour?

Brendan O'Neill: We wanted to genuinely engage with people in the US who are generating intelligent, thoughtful debates historicizing and politicizing the undermining of the freedom of speech and the growth of a new kind of petty authoritarianism, in particular, an identity politics tyranny among young leftists. We wanted to depart from the pantomime we have seen on campus in recent years where a ridiculous alt-right figure will speak and scream at feminists for being censorious, and feminists will scream back that he is a fascist. It is all heat, no light. Neither side believes in it very much. We want to turn this into a discussion about how we arrived here, historically speaking, and where we might go next.

CM: What are your reflections on last night's event, *Is the Left Eating Itself?* Two strains emerged in the conversation: On one hand, Laura Kipnis and Angus Johnston defended administrative apparatuses in restricting the speech of fascists and far right organizations on university campuses, and, on the other hand, you and Bret Weinstein presented yourselves as "first amendment absolutists," upholding Enlightenment notions of debating in public. Could you speak to this?

BON: There was more disagreement than I anticipated. I was incredibly surprised and disappointed by Kipnis in particular. She was sucked into the Kafkaesque rabbit hole of freedom of speech regarding sex on campus with that insane Title IX investigation.[1] While she angled her comments on the problem of absolute free speech, she still argued for the restriction of speech on campus for certain people such as Nazis, neo-fascists, and white supremacists. This was revealing. She was effectively saying she does not approve of the allies on the right she made since she has become known as an intellectual who stood up to crazy students. One of the most worrying tendencies among sensible American and British leftists, even radicals, is that they avoid discussing free speech because it is misunderstood as a concern of the right. They are desperate not to be called right-wing, as if that is the worst thing that could ever happen.

I continue to raise Enlightenment values because they are under attack. The Left, including the radical left, needs to recognize the founding values of the Left itself. The people who sat on the left side of the Revolutionary French National Assembly held values of reason, freedom, and progress. We need to go back and recover them. The recent tendency of the Left has been to disregard these values as unrealizable in a capitalist society. This is not a convincing argument anymore. It is not the case that our society is failing to come good on those values for everyone, which would have been our criticism 25, 30, or 40 years ago. The problem now is that our society simply does not believe in those values. These values are still radical hundreds of years later because if you defend freedom of speech, due process, or reason over emotion on campus, you will be shouted down.

CM: Proletarian socialists of the 19th and 20th centuries argued that these values would not be realized without a socialist party, through which Enlightenment values could be both taken up and fulfilled in socialism. Without such an organization, we are reckoning with the undermining of these values in capitalism and the social contradictions this system produces. How does returning to the radical character and origins of the Enlightenment facilitate their fulfilment and implementation when the radical left lacks leadership and is in disarray?

BON: I say this as somebody who believes that the Left was the highpoint of human politics thus far: *The Left is finished as a social force.* We are witnessing the death throes of it. It is a zombie idea, a zombie institution. It failed, it did not work. It never lived up to its promise and every place in which it was tried, it was neither good nor convincing enough. Consequently, over time, it is dying. We should let it die.

When I say the Left must recover these values, I am not saying that we need to resuscitate the Left. I do not think we need to build a new socialist party. We need to explore the question of how these values came to be so demeaned and recognize why this death is such an important and worrying development. Then we can think of new language, ideas, and institutions through which we can defend those values and seek to expand them. The argument that these values are impossible under capitalism and will only be fulfilled by revolution is used by radicals as an excuse that allows them to wallow in the comfort of this impossibility at a time when the prospects of revolution are virtually zero. It is a deflection from the true battle of our moment: The bourgeoisie has lost faith in itself and its founding values. The role of radicals in such a period is to help the bourgeoisie recover a sense of itself, because in losing faith in its founding values everyone suffers as a result. So long as these bourgeois values are still under attack, this is the task of anyone who is serious about liberating mankind from poverty and tyranny.

CM: What would you say about existing Left organizations—such as anarchists, Maoists or Trotskyists—that are beyond the campus cultural politics?

BON: I feel sorry for them. They need to call their day. They are exhausted. They are zombie movements, zombie organizations. They are using 20th century or, in some cases, 19th century language to try and negotiate the 21st century, which is comparable to travelling from southern England to northern England by only speaking Mongolian. This language does not work. These ideas do not work. They are trying to force a square into a circle. It becomes a form of nostalgia, a comfort blanket, and a form of moral distinction: You can distinguish yourself from the false consciousness of mass society, people who watch the Kardashians, read the tabloid newspapers, or who like crappy pop music. Consequently they are delusional in much of what they do, since it is less the case that they want to engage with the masses of society but, rather, that they want to despair of them.

CM: This echos your earlier comment about forming new institutions to salvage old political ideas and forms. It is not simply a matter of semantics, since the early Marxists, such as Rosa Luxemburg, and contemporary left groups share the same language—for example the idea of the "vanguard party"—but when sectarian groups use that language today it does not ring true. How much significance do old political forms and ideas

"Interview O'Neill" continues on page 3

"Interview O'Neill", cont. from page 1

have in transformed times, or do you suggest discarding them altogether to reimagine something totally new?

BON: When Rosa Luxemburg was defending the idea of the vanguard party, that was in a revolutionary time. Europe was in revolt. Without that, consequently, the vanguard party is not a party leading the furious throng of people who are educating themselves, desiring to take power, and agitating for greater pay, comfort, or freedom. That does not exist. In an unrevolutionary moment, the vanguard party becomes a matter of looking down upon ordinary people and wondering, "When the hell are they gonna get revolutionary? What is wrong with them?" That is why many radicals in America and Europe are drawn to foreign zones. They are always looking for evidence of revolution around the world. They love to go on political holidays to Cuba and get excited over current affairs in Venezuela because they are frustrated and disappointed with ordinary people in their society. They come to actually loathe people to a certain extent. Those parties and organizational formats have been done and dusted for a long long time. Anyone attempting to form a Marxist party today would be making a grave mistake because that is not where politics is, and that is not where politics will ever be again. The sooner we recognize that, then the sooner we can start thinking about new ideas and possibly new institutions through which we can pursue the radical improvement of human life. I do not know what form that would take. I simply know the working classes have different ideas from 100 years ago, and they are hated more by the Left than by the bourgeoisie. To create a Marxist, Trotskyist, or Maoist party today would be surreal.

CM: You suggested that we need to salvage Enlightenment values such as autonomy and free will. These values were formed in a period before the crisis of modern society brought on by industrial capitalism, which is the historical development that Marxists sought to critique and advance politically in order to overcome it. How do you make sense of the crisis of these values historically, and how would you suggest we build a revolutionary moment by revisiting these values? Is there an advantage to circumventing their crisis in industrial production?

BON: A historical understanding of where these values come from and the failure to act on them is long and complicated. In various phases of the American, French, or English Revolution, they either flourished or were undermined and proved elusive for most people. A historical understanding may be important, but I cannot overstate how important it is to defend these values.

The idea of individual autonomy has priority. You cannot have revolutionary or left-wing politics unless you have the idea of the individual. I make this point to Corbynistas. They support policies such as restricting the amount of money people can spend gambling and restricting the advertising of junk food so that children do not pressure their parents into buying it. In a draft manifesto[4] for the general election, the Corbynistas proposed discouraging the black and gay community from smoking. I keep saying if you do not trust people to decide whether or not to smoke, if you do not trust them to decide how much they should spend on a gambling machine, if you do not trust them to decide what to feed their children, do not dare tell me that you trust them to have a revolution or to organize or transform society to be freer and wealthier. This is the issue.

From the period of the New Left onwards, the Left developed the idea that there is a profound contradiction between individualism and collectivism: Reaganism and Thatcherism appear to be about the individual, and social democracy and radicalism appear to be about the collective. That is an utterly false dichotomy. It is simply obvious that strong individuals who have earned freedom, self-respect, and democracy in a revolutionary process are more likely to contribute in a strong collective movement or entity. And in turn, that collectivism would feed their individualism in the sense that individuals would want to take responsibility for society, the people they live with, and the people they are doing politics with. Without a defense of the autonomous human subject, without the defense of the idea of free will—that we are capable of making choices and seizing autonomy—without that building block of the individual, you will never have any form of revolutionary politics.

Instead, the Left, by treating individualism as an evil, proffers a politics of correcting, helping, or reeducating damaged individuals. It has convinced itself that people are fragile, weak, and unsure how to negotiate life and, therefore, need a bureaucratic scaffolding built on top of every aspect of their lives. The abandonment of individual autonomy has given rise to a deeply unpleasant paternalism.

The idea of individual autonomy, which comes from Kant's "What is Enlightenment?," is an argument against the nanny state. Kant's description of guardians resembles life today: I have a pastor who thinks for me, a book telling me how to eat, health experts telling me how to live. All I want to do is strike out, dare to know, and use my reason. We need to restate this today.

Christopher Hill, a left-wing historian, in 1972 wrote a book about the English Civil War called *The World Turned Upside Down*. That is what happened in that ten year period from 1642 to 1651, when there was a war between parliamentarians and monarchists. The world was turned upside down because every single idea in society, every single institution, was called into question. Religion, the church, the rights of priests and kings were all called into question. You had people on street corners handing out leaflets and they were in pubs trying to convince others to kill the king. Today we use the term bourgeois as an insult or a problem. We forget this was more radical than anything that came after it in terms of the break that it represented. We need to recall and recover the radicalism the bourgeoisie foisted upon the world, which was incredibly dangerous and important.

You cannot have a revolution that is led or peopled by individuals who cannot be trusted with whether or not to give their children hamburgers. It is not possible.

CM: Could you share how you originally came to declare yourself as a Marxist? Perhaps speak to your early involvement in the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) and *Living Marxism*. What has led you to defend bourgeois ideals to the end of conditioning a relevant Marxism in the future?

BON: Around 1993, I joined the Revolutionary Communist Party, a fairly small group in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s. I would have been 18 or 19. I had been reading left-wing writers, such as Trotsky and Lenin, and I had this fairly juvenile idea that I was a radical. I was looking for an organization to join. The radical left in Britain at that period was just depressing. They even looked depressing since they did not dress particularly well. And they were intellectually quite bovine since they did not take ideas seriously at all. They were only interested in action, action, action! Any protest that blew up, they would line up behind it, uncritically, get over excited about it. They were chasing the coattails of any blip in society. It was lazy and boring.

I found the RCP far more intriguing. It was a group that dressed well, which impressed me. It was, also, a daring, trusting, and deeply intellectual project. We read and hotly discussed Marx, Trotsky, Lukacs, Rubin, Mattick. We read, talked, marched, drank, made friends, and had a great time, most of the time. Their magazine, *Living Marxism*, was incredibly professional. All of that made be consider taking myself and other people much more seriously. I always laugh when people say the RCP was a cult: It was the precise opposite; it was a group of people with strong beliefs but also one which loved debate and engagement. Some people now think that any organisation built on belief or commitment is a cult because they cannot conceive of commitment to anything beyond themselves and their Twitterfeed.

They key dividing line between the RCP and the whole of the Left in Britain was over the question of the state. The RCP always questioned the idea of the state as the solution to the problems facing society. The rest of the Left at that point, including the radical left, but obviously the Labour Party, increasingly saw the state as the solution: as the only real agent of change in society, as the institution that should tame capitalism and assist poor people and govern everyday life and police interactions between different communities. The view of the RCP was that it was only because the Left is now so out of touch with ordinary and working class people that it finds itself moving closer into the bosom of the state. The RCP continually argued for the importance of free, critical thinking, wariness of officialdom, trust in the intellectual and political capabilities of the populace, greater organizational independence in workplaces rather than any kind of reliance on the bureaucratic labourist machine, and of course profound criticism of the Stalinist project in the East with its baleful impact on people's individual and collective lives.

The Left's self-entanglement with the state is the most depressing political story of the 20th century. The RCP did its part to argue that ordinary people are capable of governing their own lives and not trusting or asking the state to look after us, whatever the vagaries of capitalism might be.

CM: How would the people, which is a relatively nebulous term, actually organize themselves to become self-sufficient in that way? Could you speak more to the RCP's critique of the state: Was it only a critique of the bourgeois state, or did it also critique the old models that leftists and Marxists had for approaching or overcoming the state?

BON: Marxists and radicals will often use the old radical idea of seizing the state in order to move on to a new kind of society as a way of justifying their support for the state today. It is used to justify the expansion of the welfare state, for example, or to justify the expansion of the state into certain areas of political life. That is a profound misreading of what those early radical Marxists were saying, which was that out of necessity and by regret you might need to seize these means in order to effectively defeat the old class and move onto something else. What those people wanted was the withering away of the state. Leftists do not call for that now. In fact, particularly now, in the 80s and 90s there might have been some discomfort among the Left in what they were doing in relation to the state, but now it is uncritical and unquestioned. They think the state is people's best bet. And they want to grow the state and expand it into ever more areas of people's lives. They think the welfare state is wonderful. You never see a demonstration, as you would have 30 or 40 years ago, maybe even longer, where people would be on the streets demanding full employment. The only concern that gets Corbynistas out on the streets is when there is a Tory attack on the welfare state. Then they are out there defending the welfare state, which is effectively defending the institutionalization of unemployment and poverty. I find that deeply alarming.

The question of the state as a temporary necessity at some point in the future after the revolution is too much of a fantasy. I cannot even handle thinking about that. All I know is that in this society, the state is largely a destructive force. It is doing far too much of what it should not be doing, which is offering an apology for poverty and unemployment through the expansion of the welfare state and policing ever more areas of our lives. And it is not doing enough for what it probably should be doing which is investing in research, production, growth, new areas of technology, and so on. The state is completely topsy turvy. Too much governing of people and families and communities and not enough ignition of creative destruction and new forms of investment that might actually move us on from the recession we currently find ourselves in. The state is a failure across the board. I find it terrifying and deeply depressing that the Left thinks the state is the solution to anything.

CM: Historically the state has been expected to act as a custodian for capitalist crises. If the state were to be laissez-faire and invest into civil society, economic development, and growth, would this not lead to another crisis? How do you suggest transforming the conditions that require the state to correct crises of capitalism?

BON: Leftists and radicals just need to get over their attachment to the state in all areas of life. The example I always give is in Britain in the 1980s. Huge numbers of people lost their jobs. The mines were shut down. People in the manufacturing side of industry suffered. The reason for this was that in the mid-70s the government introduced Incapacity Benefit, which was a fund for people vaguely incapable of work. It was not for the physically disabled or crippled or mentally ill. It could apply to circumstantial failings. In the 80s the number of people in Britain receiving Incapacity Benefit grew exponentially. The program began with 100,000 individual beneficiaries, but by the end of the decade there were 1,000,000. This sums up how sinister the state is. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs. Instead of honestly confronting unemployment and the failure of capitalist society, the state, aided and abetted by the Left, particularly the public sector left, promoted this idea of incapacity. That is disgraceful and depraved and anti-human.

Radicals and working class movements made this point in Britain in the early 20th century when we had very early forms of the welfare state, which, however, was not institutionalized until the post-war period. They argued that it would facilitate unemployment rather than provide jobs to individuals, allowing them to develop self-respect, self-control, great wealth and prosperity, and a sense of individual and community strength.

Whenever I hear a left-winger, particularly radical left-wingers, on the streets defending the welfare state I want to shake them by the scruff of their neck. Everyone agrees if someone is incredibly poor and cannot feed themselves that society ought to help them. That is a civilized thing to do. But the creation of this vast, Byzantine bureaucratic institution, which now governs, feeds, and looks after millions of people including millions of unemployed people, is not something the Left should support by any stretch of the imagination.

It is that kind of uncritical, unquestioning attachment to the state, even when it's being explicitly destructive of individual potential and social solidarity. It not only undermines individual autonomy, it rips apart social solidarity. This is because the more individuals and families are encouraged to look to the state for assistance in times of need, the less likely they are to look to their neighbors or their community or their families and the less likely those social bonds will form. It destroys individual autonomy, destroys social bonds. It presents the failings of capitalism as the failings of individuals, and it has no solution to creating more wealth and creating more jobs. Anyone who supports that loses the right to call themselves left-wing.

CM: If the state were to disappear would people still be atomized since they would not have a binding organizational force bringing them together? How do you envision people's autonomy in a world without the welfare state?

BON: I am often asked this. Without the welfare state how would people feed themselves? I want to turn the question around: What terrible things are happening now as a consequence of the existence of the welfare state? There is a long list. Near the top of that list is the way in which the state attempts to portray the failures of modern bourgeois society to provide gainful employment for all people as just an accident, or possibly even individuals' faults. It trivializes unemployment. It is pulling the wool over people's eyes. If you look at opinion polls in Britain, the people who are most pro-welfare state are the middle classes. The people most critical of the welfare state are working class people and the poor. It is fascinating because what we have created in Britain, and other Western nations, is a modern day feudalistic racket where millions of middle class people are employed in and get their sense of moral purpose from looking after millions of poorer people. It is a destructive form of social organization. I would prefer it if the middle class did something productive rather than constantly lecturing or looking after the little people. And I prefer that working class and poor people have far more independence in their lives.

My argument is not that we should wipe aside the welfare state—it is too entrenched, it runs too deeply in our lives, and that means its destruction would cause instant hardship. But we must start a rigorous critique of it with an eye for moving away from it. The point is not that removing the welfare state will magically bring people together and renew their autonomy and sense of solidarity; it is simply to recognise how much the march of welfarism contributes to the diminution of both individual autonomy and social solidarity. It is no accident that the welfare state rises as both capitalism loses confidence in itself and as the Left starts to corrode in the post-war period—the welfare state is the great and terrible compromise that offset the worst impacts on life under capitalism in return for our acquiescence to life in this society and our refusal to ask difficult questions about it. The welfare state promises to look after us, but it does so by decommissioning our self-drive and cutting us off from our fellow man. My view is that struggle is preferable to this, especially among younger generations, because it is through struggling to make a better life that you discover yourself and develop bonds with other people who can help you out. In supplanting the struggle for autonomy with the comfort of survival, the welfare state stymies human endeavour and human bonding. It is destructive of the radical left project and of basic human yearning; it never ceases to amaze me that the Left loves the welfare state.

The state has to exist in some format because of the society we live in, in terms of basic functioning of everyday life. I certainly think it should be rolled back. And, if you say that people think you are a Reaganite. Even while we invite it to do certain functions, such as the creative destruction of zombie business and the investment in new forms of technology, we should still continue to be critical of it. It is the cavalier lack of criticism which is troubling.

CM: Your critique of the national welfare state in Britain reflects your critique of the EU as an overreaching technocratic entity that became an obstacle to sovereignty in various European nations. Since you have taken a pro-Brexit stance, how do you envision a future for Britain and Europe that would actually allow greater autonomy among citizens of the world?

BON: Brexit is the best thing to happen in Western politics in a generation for two reasons. First, the EU needs to be destroyed because it is anti-democratic, neoliberal, anti-working class, and racist. It has forced unelected governments on Italy and Greece, it has overridden democratic votes on Holland, France, and Ireland, it is currently trying to override Brexit, which is the largest democratic vote in British history. It elevates the needs of the European Central Bank and the European capitalist class above any working classes, particularly the Greek and Spanish working classes, which have plunged into poverty. It is removing Spain's economic independence and forced them to push through austerity measures. It was also tyrannical in Ireland when the Troika basically forced wage cuts and so on. It destroys the working classes and their living standards. It has an explicitly racist two-tier migration policy: It constantly celebrates the freedom of movement it grants to people who live in the EU, who are predominantly white people, and yet at the same time, it is ever more enforcing barbaric measures on its Mediterranean coast to prevent any black people from Africa from getting near the continent. In fact, it is even paying African dictators to keep their people out, to force them into staying where they do not want to stay. I find it horrifying that anyone who calls themselves left-wing would support that.

The second reason is because it was one of the first acts of mass public defiance in years. I cannot explain to you what the atmosphere was like. Every single figure of authority, 80% of the MPs, around 75% of the business class, every global institution, the White House the UN, the cultural elite, the celebrities, the liberal media—everyone with any power—were on their knees begging us to vote remain, pleading with us to keep the EU together. And 17.4 million people said, "No. Fuck you, we're going to do something different." That to me represents democracy in action. And this brings us back to to the question of why we are defending bourgeois values. Brexit demonstrates to us why we have to defend something like bourgeois democracy because even within that narrow field, which we all agree is not enough, you can still deliver one of the greatest body blows to the 21st century capitalist class. This is what the people of Britain did. That is what is cherishing. It was a great blow against technocracy. The Left needs to recognize that.

The final nail in the coffin of the Left is its failure to recognize the progressive radical impetus behind Brexit. The Left has written off Brexit as a neo-fascist cry, xenophobia, or little Britianism. The Western elites have turned their own crisis because we defied them in voting for Brexit and because ordinary people voted Trump when the entire media was pleading for Hillary. The only way technocratic Western elites can make sense of that is by arguing that the people have gone crazy, are turning fascistic, are post-truth, have low information, support the rule of demagogues, and are demonstrating that democracy might be a bad idea. To its lasting, historic, mortifying shame, the Left has accepted the elite's presentation of what is going on. The Left has bought into the bourgeoisie's attack on the demos. That is probably the gravest error the Left has made in years.

CM: How will the working class make good on the potential you see expressed by their defiance given the current lack of Left leadership?

BON: That remains to be seen. It is admirable that the people who voted Brexit stick to it, despite the indignation of the political elite and the Left. I cannot work out where this resolve comes from. They have an ability to refuse to listen to the fear mongering, to block out this constant daily demonization and libel against them, and to maintain an individual and community sense of themselves. That is genuinely worth celebrating. I do not know what society will look like after Brexit. I simply know that people who defied the establishment, defied the European elites, defied a capitalist class that has been destroying the European working class over the past 10 years, are sticking by the stand they made. There is no leadership to it. But wherever that is coming from we need to tap into it. That could be the beginning of a new politics.

CM: So you understand this as a potential new beginning and a good final nail in the coffin to what you see as a pseudo-left?

BON: I hope it is a nail in the coffin of technocracy and those people who spent the last few decades freezing politics and the great questions of history: power, sovereignty, class, nationhood, and democracy. The EU is like a lid on all those bubbling questions of history. In blowing that lid off, we have hopefully unfrozen those great unresolved questions of why bourgeois values cannot become good on. All those questions that the EU explicitly desired to suppress by rendering politics into a managerial activity done by experts are now potentially returned to the public realm. That is incredibly exciting. It is a great opportunity for radicals, whatever side of the spectrum they come from, and for rethinking politics. As to where it will go, I have no idea. But that is another thing I think is exciting. **|P**

Transcribed by Chris Mansour

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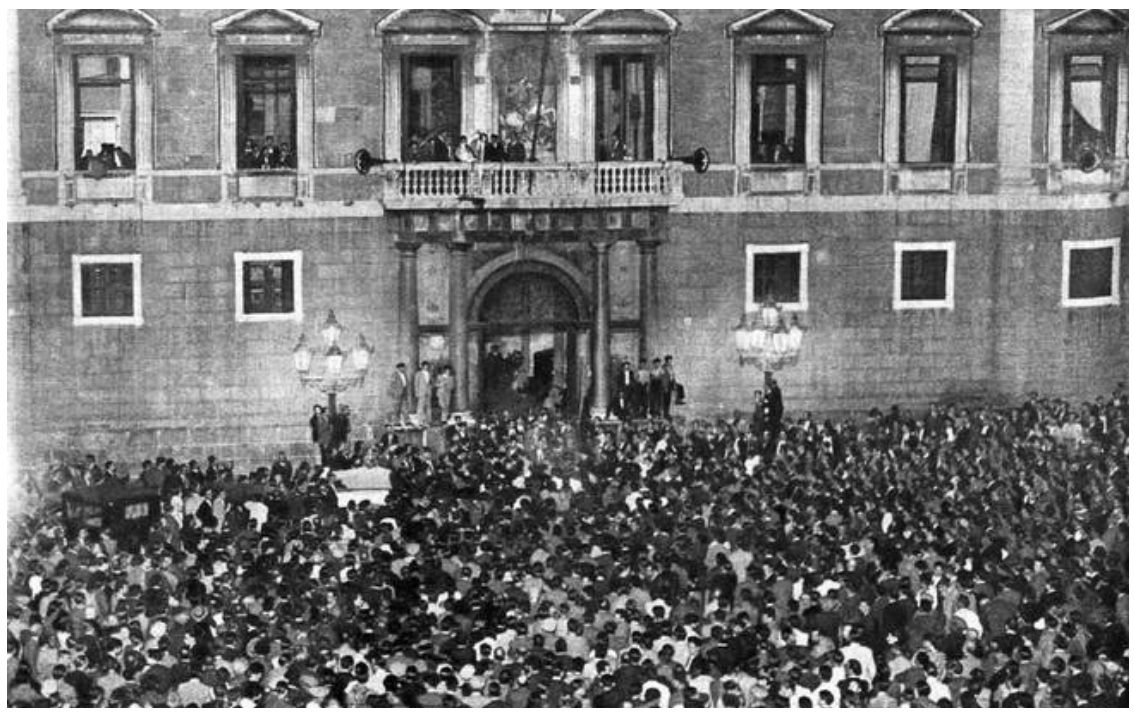
The struggle for a Catalan republic: Rethinking the way forward

Kacper Grass



Proclamation of the 'Catalan State' within the 'Spanish Federel Republic' in Barcelona by the President of the Generalita of Catalonia, Lluís Companys on October 6, 1934.

THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 2017 and the subsequent election held on December 21st have done little to resolve the issue of Catalan independence, which has now escalated into a regional and national crisis marked by political gridlock and polarization among the Catalan people. This polarization has taken a particular toll on the Catalan left as well as on the region's labor movement, allowing the bourgeoisie to remain in power and further its own agenda by exploiting the issue while the Left remains fractionalized and at odds about the way forward. A historical analysis of the Catalan Left's relationship with the independence movement from its origins to the present explains the state of affairs today and suggests a way forward, both for the Catalan Left as well as for the working class that depends on it.

The origins of Catalan independence as a leftist movement

The Catalan struggle for independence can be traced back to 1931, when Francesc Macià and Lluís Companys founded the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) following the death of Miguel Primo de Rivera and the collapse of his autocratic regime. Like many other republican parties that appeared in Spain at this crucial moment, the ERC was committed to socialist and anti-monarchist values. However, contrary to some of its counterparts from other regions of the country, the ERC's nationalist tendencies distanced it from both the Soviet Union and the international socialist movement. In the period of political instability that followed, Macià was serving as the acting president of Catalonia and took advantage of the temporary power vacuum to proclaim the "Catalan Republic as a state of the Iberian Federation" on April 14.[1] That day coincided with the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic, which was quick to react and reincorporate Catalonia by April 17. In an act of political compromise, Catalonia was granted a high degree of self-government relative to the other regions of Spain. The resulting Statute of Autonomy established the Catalan government known as the Generalitat in 1932, being approved in a regional referendum that enjoyed 99.49 percent support with a high voter turnout of 75.13 percent.[2]

In 1933, Companys succeeded Macià as president of the Generalitat. Two years earlier he had led the ERC in the Spanish parliamentary elections of 1931, announcing in Madrid after the passing of the Statute of Autonomy that "the Catalan members of the Parliament have come here not only to defend our law of autonomy... and the fraternal and democratic understanding of the members of Parliament, but also to participate in matters that affect the greatness of Spain: the Constitution, the agrarian reforms, and social legislation."[3] Nonetheless, the agrarian reforms and social legislation that Companys envisioned were severely threatened by the Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right's (CEDA) victory in the 1934 elections. The CEDA's rise to power ended left-wing rule in the Second Republic and, for the first time, introduced fascist elements into the Spanish parliament. In response, a left-wing insurrectionary movement broke out across the country, culminating in a major miners' strike in Asturias on October 4 and Companys' proclamation of the "Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic" on October 6, 1934.[4] The next day, however, the Spanish central government regained control in Catalonia, arresting Companys and suspending the region's autonomy. General Francisco Franco was sent to suppress the Asturian miners, who had no choice but to capitulate after the army's arrival. Companys was pardoned two years later when the country's left-wing parties united in the Popular Front coalition to win the elections of 1936 and to restore the autonomy of Catalonia. The coalition consisted of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), among others. During the civil war that broke out soon after the elections, the Popular Front was supported by the ERC, the PSOE-affiliated Workers' General Union (UGT), as well as the anarcho-syndicalist trade union National Confederation of Labor – Iberian Anarchist Federation (CNT-FAI).

The victory of the fascist forces in 1939 brought about the period of political and cultural repression that lasted until Franco's death in 1975. Franco's dictatorship was perhaps most strongly felt in Catalonia and the Basque Country, two regions in which the local languages were banned from the public sphere in an effort to forcefully assimilate the people. Nonetheless, after the collapse of the Francoist regime and the ratification of the 1978 Spanish Constitution by all of the country's regional governments, a new Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia was passed by regional referendum the following year. This time, though, popular support for the Statute was lower than in 1931, as 88.1 percent voted in favor and voter turnout was 59.7 percent.[2]

Fractionalization of the Left and bourgeois appropriation of the independence movement

The re-emergence of the Left in Catalonia was headed by the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (PSC), the regional affiliate of the PSOE; the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC), the regional affiliate of the PCE; and the ERC. Despite the transition to democracy and the legalization of left-wing parties, nearly four decades of fascist rule had taken their toll on Catalonia's political culture, which was now dominated by centrist bourgeois parties. Not until the regional elections of 2003 did a left-wing coalition form a government in Catalonia. The members of this so-called *Tripartit*, formed by the ERC, the PSC, and a splinter group of the now-defunct PSUC called the Initiative for Catalonia Greens – United and Alternative Left (ICV-EUiA), found common ground in their plans to amend the 1979 Statute of Autonomy in order to expand the self-governing powers of the Generalitat. Though the updated draft of the Statute was composed by all three parties, the ERC did not support the new law in parliament and encouraged a "no" vote in the referendum on the grounds that the final version did not demand sufficient autonomy. Nonetheless, the law was ultimately passed in parliament but received a controversially low level of popular support in the referendum, where 73.24 percent were in favor with a voter turnout of only 48.85 percent.[2] By the time of the referendum, tensions between the ERC and its coalition partners had escalated to the point that a snap election was called in 2006 in order to preserve the *Tripartit* for another electoral term.

In 2010, however, the Constitutional Court of Spain challenged the legality of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy and finally rewrote fourteen of its articles. The intervention sparked a wave of protests in Catalonia and prompted the ERC to take a separatist stance, favoring independence over autonomy and leaving the *Tripartit* to run alone in the 2010 regional elections. The decision proved disastrous for the Catalan Left, as it allowed the centrist bourgeois Convergence and Union Party (CiU) to form a minority government with support from the People's Party of Catalonia (PPC), the regional affiliate of the right-wing People's Party that was created by former members of Franco's government after his death. Despite the ruling government's conservative ideology, massive pro-independence protests on Catalonia's National Day in 2012 prompted the CiU president Artur Mas to call a snap election that same year. Capitalizing on the recently manifested popular support for independence, Mas announced that "this election will not be held to help a party to perpetuate itself in power. It will be held so that the whole of the Catalan population decides democratically and peacefully what their future will be as a nation."[5] The CiU's electoral victory marked the bourgeois appropriation of the independence movement, leaving the Left divided between separatist and autonomist factions and unable to cooperate with one another.

As the issue of independence came to dominate the political agenda in Catalonia, the 2015 elections produced a dramatic change in the region's political landscape. The separatist factions of the PSC split to form the Left Movement (MES) which together with the ERC joined a number of centrist bourgeois parties such as the Democrats of Catalonia (DC), the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC), as well as the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT) that emerged from recent splits in the ruling CiU. This grand separatist coalition, known as Together for Yes (JxSí), campaigned on the promise of putting the issue of independence to referendum. Nonetheless, even though it provided the ERC and the MES a strong platform on which to push their separatist agendas, it forced them to compromise much in their social and economic positions to satisfy the capitalist bourgeois interests that dominated the coalition. The anti-independence PSC managed to run alone but was severely weakened by the loss of both members and voters to the independence movement. The 2015 elections also saw the formation of a new Leftist coalition called Catalonia Yes We Can (CatSíqueesPot), which was formed by the ICV, the EUiA, and a new green party called Equo. The coalition's most potent force, however, was Catalonia's regional affiliate of the recently formed left-wing party Podemos. Podem, as they are called in Catalan, supported amending the Spanish Constitution to allow for a referendum on independence but opposed the JxSí's plans to hold an unconstitutional vote on the issue. This put the parties of CatSíqueesPot at odds with both the autonomist PSC and the left-wing groups which joined the separatist JxSí. Finally, the election was notable for the rise of the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), a revolutionary far-left group which demanded independence but vehemently opposed joining forces with the members of the JxSí coalition. The anti-independence centrists were represented by the newly formed Party of the Citizenry (C's) while the PPC represented the strongly pro-Spanish right-wing. The elections concluded with JxSí winning 62 out of 135 parliamentary seats, lacking the majority needed to form a government outright.[6] The coalition members therefore had no choice but to reach out for support to the separatist CUP, which managed to win 10 seats and block the investiture of Artur Mas as president in favor of Carles Puigdemont, whom they saw as somewhat more agreeable to their interests.[6] This set the stage for the events of 2017.

Referendum, Strike, and New Elections Following Suspension of Autonomy

On October 1, 2017, Catalans went to the polls to vote in the long-awaited, yet still illegal, referendum for independence. Support was high amongst those who voted (92.01 percent), but the referendum's legitimacy was questioned as voter turnout hit a record low of 43.03 percent.[7] Two days later, a general strike was called in protest of several documented cases of violent police repression at the polls. Three far-left Catalan trade unions—the Workers' Trade Union Coordinator (COS), the Catalan Trade Union Confederation (I-SCS), as well as the Syndicate of Students of the Catalan Countries (SEPC)—all viewing the CUP as their movement's political representation in parliament, formed the backbone of the strike. They were joined by the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist unions General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and the National Confederation of Labor (CNT). Nonetheless, like the parliamentary Left, the labor movement was also sharply divided on the independence issue. Indeed, Spain's two largest unions refused to participate in the Catalan general strike. Both the general secretaries of the PSC/PSOE-affiliated UGT and the EUiA/PCE-affiliated Workers' Commissions (CCOO) abstained from the protests, opposing Catalan separatism.

Following in the footsteps of both Macià and Companys, Puigdemont declared Catalonia an independent state on October 27, 2017, an act that prompted quick retaliation from Madrid. Unlike Companys, however, Puigdemont evaded arrest by seeking exile in Brussels while his ERC vice-president Oriol Junqueras was imprisoned along with several cabinet members on charges of sedition. Like in 1934, Catalonia's autonomy was suspended and the Generalitat was dissolved until new elections could be held on December 21. This time around, the political landscape had changed little since 2015. Most notably, as tensions began to rise between the still-exiled president and his imprisoned vice-president, the JxSí coalition split into Puigdemont's Together for Catalonia (JuntsxCat), which consisted of PDeCAT and an assortment of independent politicians, and Junqueras' Republican Left of Catalonia – Catalonia Yes (ERC-CatSí), which was supported by both the left-wing MES as well as the centrist DC. For fear of failure at the polls, the PSC was forced to compromise its leftist platform by forming an unofficial coalition with the centrist and anti-independence party United to Advance (Units per Avançar). The Podemos-led CatSíqueesPot coalition remained intact with its old green and left-wing partners but ran under the new label Catalonia in Common – We Can (CatComú-Podem). The revolutionary separatist CUP once again ran independently while the two center and right-wing parties, C's and PPC, respectively, remained unchanged. The election resulted in a continued stalemate on the issue of independence and further losses for the Left. The C's won a majority of 36 seats, but as JuntsxCat and ERC-Catsí won 34 and 32 seats respectively, they had no option but try to reunite to form a government with the now-weakened CUP, which dropped from 10 to only 4 seats.[8] CatComú-Podem lost seats as well, while the PSC exchanged its leftist platform for an electoral gain of one seat. The PPC also lost seats, as anti-independence voters disappointed by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's handling of the secessionist crisis moved to the center in support of the C's.

Revolutionary internationalism or reactionary nationalism?

The CUP's clear anti-capitalist stance as well as its continued opposition to the neoliberal establishment in the Catalan parliament have won it the sympathy and support of a broad array of Marxist tendencies. Particularly represented among them are a number of Trotskyist groups, who frame the independence movement as an ongoing struggle for national liberation and the people's right to self-determination. Indeed, the party's platform defines "internationalism as a form of egalitarian, anti-colonial and fraternal relations between peoples, for the common management of general affairs and for overcoming international conflicts."[9] Furthermore, the platform explains that "the CUP's rupturist position is opposed to the hegemonic Catalanist position, as independence for the country without a breakaway from capitalist institutions is not something that the CUP's revolutionary position would support. Significantly, the CUP is opposed to the reformist position of the other independentists, as it doesn't desire social democratic reforms, rather a rupture from the capitalist system."[9]

Nonetheless, the CUP's declining popular support—as noted by its recent electoral setback—puts the efficacy and relevance of the party's strategy into question. Its calls for the "defense of national language and identity," the "promotion and officiality of Catalan throughout the national territory," as well as the "reinforcement of cultural roots in the Catalan Countries" have marginalized a large sector of the working class over issues of cultural and linguistic identity. In fact, this nationalist rhetoric has been exploited by the liberal Party of the Citizenry, which managed to persuade a significant portion of the working class to vote against their own economic interests in the December election by evoking memories of Francoist cultural and linguistic repression in Catalonia.

Rethinking the way forward

The evolution of the independence issue in Catalonia has led to years of political gridlock and a deeply polarized society. The Left has fractionalized into three principal camps: the autonomists in favor of increasing the region's level of self-government, the reformists in favor of a legal referendum regarding independence, and the revolutionaries who wish to secede from the Spanish state by any means necessary. The December 21 election demonstrated a desperate move by the PSC to remain in parliament. While politically effective, the party's reliance on its conservative running mate has resulted in the compromise of its leftist principles, and so the Socialists' Party of Catalonia continues as socialist in name alone. Moreover, the revolutionary CUP's loss of more than half of its seats in parliament since the 2015 elections shows that even pro-independence voters have become weary of the far left's radical approach to the issue. Lastly, the independence movement has not received support from any party with national affiliation, further isolating the coalition parties of CatComú-Podem from those of ERC-CatSí. The same is true of the labor movement, as the nationally affiliated labor unions UGT and CCOO found themselves at odds with the I-CSC, the COS, and the SEPC during the October 3 general strike.

The result of this fractionalization has been a state of disarray which the bourgeois centrists were quick to exploit, enjoying the political gridlock that allowed them to remain in government, speaking loudly of independence while silently perpetuating the status quo. This status quo will continue until the Left manages to reunite and remain united. Perhaps the way forward is actually a step backward to the days of the *Tripartit*. If the people of Catalonia no longer show the same support for independence as they did in the times of the Second Republic, perhaps it would be in their interest if the Left could compromise on a viable solution to what has become a regional and national crisis and focus instead on reforming a broken tax policy, creating jobs for a largely unemployed working class, and improving living conditions for the region's homeless and immigrant populations. But as long as the Left remains incapable or unwilling to create a new popular front, it will remain a fractionalized and, effectively, sterilized political force. As long as the Left remains divided, no step forward can be taken. **IP**

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Keeping the movement going

An interview with Gayle McLaughlin

William Lushbough

Gayle McLaughlin served two four-year terms as the mayor of Richmond, California, first elected in 2006 and then reelected in 2010. She was first elected to city council in 2004 as a member of the Green Party and was again elected to the council in 2014 after finishing her second term as mayor. She is a co-founder of the Richmond Progressive Alliance, which enjoys a majority on the Richmond City Council. In 2017, Gayle announced her candidacy for Lieutenant Governor of California. The election will be held on November 6, 2018. What follows is an edited transcript of the interview conducted with McLaughlin by William Lushbough of the Platypus Affiliated Society on December 2, 2017, at her home in Richmond.

William Lushbough: In 2006 you were elected to the first of two four-year terms as the mayor of Richmond, California, the largest U.S. city to be led by a Green Party member. That made you one of the models for a successful local third-party campaign. What were some of the major challenges you faced running outside of the Democratic Party?

Gayle McLaughlin: The Democratic Party has never endorsed any of my campaigns. Now, local campaigns for City Council in California are non-partisan races, so I always make it clear that I am a member of the Green Party and of the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA), which is an organization that brings progressives together regardless of party affiliation or no-party affiliation. Richmond is a pretty Democratic city and I find that people resonate with my values; RPA values, it turns out, are the values of people all over Richmond and, I believe, beyond. So I made it clear that I was a member of the Green Party and stood for social justice, economic justice, ecological wisdom, grassroots democracy, etc. When you talk on a grassroots level to people, when you talk about the substance of your values, the party is easily set aside. Of course, the Greens that supported me were very pleased to embrace me, but it did not seem to interfere except for the endorsement process, which, I suppose, gets to the core of your question.

The Democratic Party would not and does not, to my knowledge, ever endorse a non-Democrat. The same goes for some of the building trade unions: in my first city council campaign, they said, "we never endorse Greens!" So there were obstacles in terms of getting endorsements. But, in terms of reaching the people, it just took a lot of grassroots work, going out to reach people. If anything it was Chevron's interference that was the worst. They would send out misinformation and we had to really make it clear through an education campaign that we needed Chevron out of our city politics. "They have a big refinery in our city, they make billions of dollars, but democracy is for the people"—that was our message.

WL: Was Chevron part of the reason why you did not run as a Democrat?

GM: Chevron, just like all big corporations, will go with whoever will align with them. They can go with the Democrats, of course, or with Republicans, and if some independent lined up with their agenda, they would not have a problem with them either. For them, it is all their bottom line—who they can influence and manipulate.

WL: What originally made you decide to run as, specifically, a Green Party candidate for the mayor of Richmond? Why the Green Party?

GM: I joined the Green Party because their ten key values are values that I espouse. Also, they stated clearly that no corporate money should be in politics, which was very important to me. I have been an activist my whole adult life. Since I was a teenager, it has been clear to me that the big corporate-controlled parties were not representing the needs of people. They were not representing the needs of working families, the needs of oppressed populations. I started to align myself with other activists who were also looking for third-party alternatives. I never felt that someone being a registered Democrat constituted a barrier to dialogue.

So, when I ran for city council I was already a Green Party member. We had a local Richmond chapter. At first, we started out like a club of people who had Green values, but eventually we became an official group. I kept my registration as I ran for city council and mayor. The Green Party seemed to me at the time I registered to be gaining momentum. Ralph Nader had run on the Green Party ticket a couple of times. He had big rallies and that mass movement was something that I wanted to be a part of. It has always been linking up and helping to grow mass movements that has motivated my politics.

WL: So you just saw more promise engaging in that mass movement, rather than attempting to mount a change within the Democratic Party?

GM: Yeah I did, that is putting it well.

WL: Prior to your move to Richmond and your involvement in the RPA, you were involved in Chicago with the Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador and also with the Chicago Rainbow Push Coalition. The question is: What informed your decision to shift from solidarity activism to municipal politics?

GM: I had been involved with more national and international issues—for instance, my anti-war work focused on stopping U.S. involvement in the war in El Salvador. When I moved to Richmond, as the super rallies for Ralph Nader started gaining momentum, it was clear to me that, as Bernie Sanders has recently emphasized, we need people to run at the local level, city council level, school-board level, and really to start shifting politics all over. I wanted to root myself in one place and get involved in local politics to be a part of the movement. So in Richmond we started having a dialogue among Richmond Greens and other progressives who eventually formed the RPA. We were doing some local politics already, but we were also doing anti-war work; we had participated in anti-war marches in San Francisco to oppose the occupation of Iraq. We had our hands in various levels of politics, local, state, and national, but our focus at a certain became the city's many challenges: crime, poverty, and the health problems associated with the refinery. The city council was entirely in Chevron's hands. We knew we had to make change. Of course, we always try to connect with the larger struggle. Richmond is not an island. We are a part of a country and a wider world, but we decided to root ourselves in the local struggle.

WL: You mentioned Chevron and your efforts to combat it. In 2013 you led the effort in the Richmond City Council to sue Chevron for the 2012 refinery fire. Going a little more broadly with that, how do you think the Left should approach the environmental crisis?

GM: What works first of all is community mobilizing. It is always the power of numbers that makes a difference. However, you also need people in decision-making positions. At all levels of government, you need progressives in office working side by side with the movement. In Richmond there was a time when Chevron representatives had a desk outside of the city manager's office. That is how dominant this big corporation was on our city hall. So, we had to break through, to make a crack in that system. We did that by mobilizing. We are grassroots organizers. We came together, put the party aside. By knocking on doors, making phone calls, going to community events, and having forums where we shared our views and the candidates were introduced. I was one candidate in 2004 and there was another one, Andrés Soto. We both had a chance to talk, but we also heard from community leaders and from the general public. So it was partially a matter of learning from the community what they were dealing with and partially educating the community about what we had done research on and what we had learned from dealing with the city council at that time, about how dominated our city was by Chevron. In the process, we had to break through a lot of misinformation: there was a lot of, "We need Chevron. Chevron pays the city so much in taxes." So we had to say, "This is how much Chevron makes in profits operating in our city. This is how much asthma we have as a result. This is how over the years our community has gotten poorer." Wealth inequality was something we were really clear on. So, that was how we broke through: by educating and learning from the community.

WL: What has not worked in your experience?

GM: Before the RPA came about there were lots of good activists—Fighting Against Chevron, the West Country Toxic Coalition, Communities for a Better Environment—all organizations we continue to work with. But they had no allies sitting on the city council, so they could only do so much. They would raise issues, saying, "We need Chevron to reduce its pollution." And they did make some progress, but, by the time the RPA was forming, they were running up against obstacles. There were also challenges with non-profits because Chevron throws out little bits of money to city non-profits, by which they buy their silence. Chevron often uses the faces of the staff of non-profits in their newsletters. They buy up billboards and they put up the face of local non-profits saying, "We think Chevron is doing good work." In reality, of course, the sums they throw to non-profits are nowhere near what they should be paying in fair taxation. We have made great progress in that, by the way. We got one hundred and fifty million in additional taxes from Chevron in the time I was mayor, but it is still not enough. But when you get more in taxation from big corporations, government—good government—can help the community. Good government can give grants to non-profits that are also doing good work. So we made the case: "Yeah, they give some money to non-profits. That is good. We are okay with that, but we are not okay with the fact that non-profits are thereby silenced. We want the truth to be told!" We would rather them pay more in taxes and go distribute the needed services from City Hall.

WL: Steve Early's book *Refinery Town* sheds light on the economic transformation that gripped Richmond in the late 60s to early 70s. Richmond also seems to have been a hotbed of New Left radicalism in the late 60s. Early points out that the 1973 Shell Oil refinery strike was supported by the Bay Area Students for a Democratic Society and the Oil Chemical Atomic Workers led by labor environmentalist Tony Mazzocchi. So how did this earlier history inform the RPA later on?

GM: In the 60s there was a lot happening. I was not in the Bay Area at the time, but I know some of this history. In Richmond the Black Panthers had a chapter and ran a breakfast program that helped to dispense food to kids in local elementary schools. Of course, there was also union work around oil companies. But we in the RPA were not particularly reaching back to the 1960s. We all came from different struggles and many of us had an activist history in other countries. We all had a union support in our history and we all understood the importance and leadership role that unions have played and should continue to play. But at the time we were forming the Alliance, we mainly just saw the decline of the city. We knew there was good activism in the past, but we also knew there was growing poverty and crime. It is not just Richmond, of course. Urban environments everywhere in this period saw a decline of neighborhoods, especially people-of-wreally turn that downward spiral around, and to start the trajectory spiraling up in terms of communities' health, wellbeing, and happiness. These big corporations are the opposition. Chevron was our big "one percenter" in Richmond. So, there were grassroots organizations even as Richmond started going downhill. We stood on the shoulders of the many who went before, but we did form this independent organization and did something that no other organization in Richmond had done: run people for office without corporate money who would stand side by side with, and be organizers themselves within, the movement. That was unique: To have elected officials, corporate-free elected officials, be organizers as well. It is not like you get elected and join some elite class of elected officials. No, you still have to build and organize with the community, the movement in general.

WL: To piggyback on that point on the RPA being both activists and officeholders: Since the 2016 election the RPA has held a supermajority on the city council. What have been the biggest hurdles to implementing your program within a municipal government?

GM: There have been a lot of challenges. Chevron has opposed us at every juncture. Our elections are flooded with Chevron money. For instance, in 2014 they spent three and a half million dollars to defeat me and two other progressives running for city council. We all won and all the Chevron-funded candidates lost. During election season their money was a big challenge that we have had to overcome. We had to reach out to people and tell them to read the small print on the mailers: "funded by Chevron." Also, once I got into office, it was very hard. I would be sitting in these closed sessions with people I did not agree with. In open sessions at least the community would be there so I felt less isolated. People would come to city council meetings, speak at the public podium, and give the progressive viewpoint that I gave from the dais. But it was still hard. We lost many votes, but we also won many votes by mobilizing the community. For example, there was a resolution that I brought when I was in first year as a city council member to have the right state department oversight on some toxic land in Richmond. We needed a comprehensive cleanup of this Superfund site with its nasty brew of toxins left over by then-departed heavy industries. I brought the resolution forward; though I knew the other city council members were not going to listen to me. They wanted to build on that land even though it was not properly cleaned up. So, we organized the community. There were 35 speakers who came and held up signs "protect our health," "no development until it is comprehensively cleaned up," and others. It put pressure on the other council members and they ended up voting for my resolution. That is how we made progress when we were in a minority. In later years there would be one more RPA person joining me, then two more. But we were always in a minority, so always aware that the voice of the community had to enter that council chamber directly as well as through us.

Now we have a supermajority, but we still have movement-building going on. And we want people in the council chambers because that is what democracy is all about. You cannot just have elected officials, even if they are wonderful and corporate-free, making decisions in isolation from the community. Every individual brings their own personal insight and experience and that impacts the overall dialogue and the ultimate decision. We still have a very active community and, of course, we have the votes on the city council, but we still put pressure on the other two non-RPA councilors to wake up and see that we have to go in the progressive direction, if we are really going to move our city further. The city has already transformed quite amazingly from what it used to be, but we have to keep up the pressure and keep the transformation going.

WL: On keeping that transformation going, I am wondering if there have been political limits to that, and if those limits prompted the lieutenant governor campaign?

GM: What prompted me to run this statewide race is that, after November 2016, when we got two more RPA members elected to the council—which gave us five-out-of-seven corporate-free members on the council—we found that people all over the Bay Area, all over California, and even throughout the nation were asking us, "How did you do it? How did you transform the politics? How did you make the phenomenal changes you made in Richmond?" We reduced homicide by 75%. We raised the minimum wage to $15 per hour. We passed the first new rent control law in California in 30 years. We joined a community choice energy program where 85% of our residents get their electricity from cleaner, greener, and cheaper sources of energy. "So, how did you do all of this?" people asked. I started giving presentations sharing the RPA model. Of course, every community has their own issues and their own style of organizing, but we feel we have a lot of tools that people can use. At a certain point it became clear to some of us in the RPA that running a statewide race would give a larger stage to the message of building progressive alliances. So I decided to run for lieutenant governor as an organizing project to encourage progressive alliances to be built all over California. Already something like seven or eight of them have emerged. I am running to win and, hopefully, when I win, I will keep the organizing going and network the alliances and all the Our Revolution (OR) groups. I have already received 26 local California OR group endorsements. The idea is to build a statewide movement, network these local groups together, and we will have that power to address our statewide issues. So, that is what prompted me to run for lieutenant governor.

The challenges and limitations that remain on the city council in Richmond is that Mayor Tom Butt has grown further away from the RPA and become very market-oriented. For instance, he is very much opposed to rent control. We do not think he has much of a following anymore. Previously, he was somewhat allied to us and that is how he got to be mayor.

WL: You have said before at the Howard Zinn Book Fair that you would consider this campaign a success as long as it established more progressive alliances throughout California, teaching different cities the tools that you have used to do what you have done and also to bolster the OR movement. Who do you see as potentially building these political efforts from the ground up?

GM: There are so many great progressives leaders up and down California. It has been just really inspiring to be traveling and meeting so many progressive groups coming together in coalition, in San Diego, Los Angeles, South Bay, San Jose, the North Coast, and San Francisco. What Bernie did in 2016 was really to move the progressive movement forward. We often say in the RPA "he moved us forward 30 years." We have been working really hard in various areas, but now we had this person connecting us all, making the case for our progressive values nationwide. People got a big boost with Bernie. My role as a candidate, the role of my campaign, has been to keep that movement going and spread the word about the RPA. Bernie said "we have to have progressive elected officials at all levels of government" and people heard that. More and more people are stepping up to run as corporate-free candidates on the local level, for state assembly, etc. Now the term we coined, "corporate-free," has become very common.

WL: I noticed that you reached out to the East Bay Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) for an endorsement.[1] I am wondering why did you want their endorsement for your lieutenant governor campaign? What kind alliance do you envision with that organization which seems to be different demographically than the RPA, where it is more so younger activists in their early 30s while the RPA is more seasoned older activists?

GM: The RPA steering committee is very young. We have a 28-person steering committee: It has a majority of people of color, a majority of women, and a majority of people under forty. The progressive mindset of diversity was always a very much a part of our agenda. But still we can use more millennials.

DSA is very youth-driven. They have grown especially since the Bernie campaign. Bernie made the term "socialist" much more common and much more acceptable throughout our nation. I have always had the socialist mindset and I think the whole anti-corporate struggle is a struggle against capitalism and the harm that it causes. So reaching out to DSA was important. They are a part, a very strong part, of our movement for change. I was very excited to get the endorsement of East Bay DSA, San Francisco DSA, and Peninsula DSA. I hope to receive the Los Angles DSA endorsement as well.

WL: Regarding the issues that you are fighting for or the problems you are fighting against, what do you see as the root? Do you see it as capitalism or greed? What is it for you?

GM: When it comes to small businesses, small-time capitalism, many are just barely making it. As a candidate I take no corporate money or even small business money; that is where I draw the line. I only receive small donations from individuals. But we do see the small business community as a good element for our communities and the same is true even of other, bigger businesses that are being responsible. But capitalism has allowed mega-corporations to create enormous wealth and income inequality. If we can work together we can regulate corporations and ultimately build the kind of socialist society that we all, including future generations, can thrive in.

WL: Going back to the Our Revolution (OR) political action organization that grew out of the Bernie Sanders campaign, based on your history on running outside the Democratic Party, I am wondering if you worry about this organization moving voters back into that party?

GM: The national OR, based in Washington D.C., is one thing, and then there are all the local chapters. We have been in touch with the national group as well as all the local groups. I find that the national group is being clear: We have heard it from Nina Turner that their endorsement process has been and will be based not on party but on progressive values, i.e. on whether or not the local OR's support the candidates. So the national OR has yet to endorse for the lieutenant governor race, but I have more local OR endorsements than any candidate in the nation with 26 California OR endorsements. So I hope that is meaningful to the national OR and they will endorse me.

As for leading people back into the Democratic Party, the way I approach it is that a lot of the OR folks are in the Democratic Party but they fight the good fight within it. I consider myself an independent Berniecrat, but there are, of course, the Democratic Party Berniecrats and I support them because they are fighting a good fight. They really want to take control of the party away from the corporate Democrats. So I say, "Go for it! If you win (and I hope you do), it really will not be the same party anymore. It will be something totally new, because for decades the Democratic Party have been corporate controlled." So I am staying on the outside. I am connecting Green Party, Peace and Freedom Party, those with no party affiliation, and progressive Democrats. But I understand people feel a strong momentum and want to do all they can to change the Democratic Party and that is a good thing too.

WL: Many political movements on the Right make appeals that are similar to progressive and social democratic movements. For instance, President Donald Trump ran his campaign promising to create more jobs, to make healthcare more affordable, and to end political corruption. In what ways do groups like OR and RPA distinguish themselves to the voter from right-wing movements that make similar pleas?

GM: When we talk about an independent political movement we have to say an independent progressive political movement. What Donald Trump and the right-wingers are promoting is that they are going to change politics, but we know otherwise. We have to bring out the hypocrisy and the lack of moral foundation of Donald Trump and his people, the bad policies that they are putting out, and how those policies will impact your average working middle class person, the unemployed, struggling families, and the homeless. The people that have followed Donald Trump have been really bamboozled. The average Trump supporter does not understand where he is leading us.

We should not be afraid of engaging with Trump's supporters and sharing the truth about where we are at as a society and the catastrophic freefall that this president is bringing the whole world into. These are dire times. We should reach out to average people, regardless of where they have been or how they have been manipulated in the past: That will be part of the change. We have to break through the false notions some people have about how things are going to change. He has to say to them, "Hey, it is not an easy struggle we are in, but each of us has a role and together there is a joy in this struggle." Because solidarity with one another brings us closer as human beings and gives us joy in making change together. That us how it will be done, not by looking towards a false leader like Donald Trump. **|P**

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1 "As a nascent organization, we should be flattered that Gayle McLaughlin and Jovanka Beckles would reach out to us for an endorsement. Such a request speaks volumes about the work we've done since November or longer in the case of our seasoned members." Herrera Cuevas, Antonio. Orr, William. 'Until Our Members Have Agency, EBDSA Should Not Endorse'. Available online at: <http://www.eastbaydsa.org/resources-endorsements-until-members-have-agency-ebdsa-should-not-endorse>.